Japan

1905.

Christians and Relief Work

during the

Famine in Northern Japan

by

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The Famine and Christian Work.

The failure of the rice crop in the North of Japan last year and the famine relief work which followed have had a very important bearing upon Christian work.

As there was only 1/5 of a crop in the famine district the loss there amounted to more than thirty million *yen*. About one million people were classed as poverty-stricken (kyūmin) and for several months the most wretched food was eaten by many thousands. The miserable condition of those in greatest distress called forth universal sympathy. With the dawn of a better day there was great rejoicing that deaths actually due to lack of food had been very, very few.

Missionaries and other Christians were very prominent in the work of relief. A committee of six missionaries, with one other Christian gentleman, was the first committee organized to secure funds for the help of the stricken people. In addition to securing nearly a quarter of a million *yen*, which was disbursed by themselves, they were largely influential in raising nearly another million *yen*, which was sent through official channels. The Chairman of this Foreign Committee of Relief was a member of the Japan Mission of the Reformed Church in the United States.

Japan is nominally a Buddhist country, but although the Buddhist committee held meetings all over the Empire and tried to collect money wherever possible, the Japanese people contributed very little through them. On the contrary thousands of *yen* in money and goods were given through the committee of Christian pastors.

The famine region is on the northeast coast of the main island with Sendai almost exactly in the center. Miyagi and Fukushima, the two worst provinces, are studded with churches and preaching places of the Japan Mission of the Reformed Church in the United States, while the North Japan Mission of the Reformed Church in America has two preaching places in Iwate. The Reformed Missions have as many missionaries, and the Church of Christ in Japan has as many pastors and evangelists, in the famine region as have all other Missions or denominations put together. All Christian churches gave for the relief of the famine sufferers, but it is not strange that this church took such a large part in, and will reap such a large proportion of the spiritual harvest from, this bit of Christian work.

Members of the Council of Missions gave very liberally, and assisted in raising funds in the places where they live and in securing contributions from constituents in the homeland. Four of the Boards sent out altogether more than 35,000 *yen* through the regular Mission treasuries. Some ten thousand of the fourteen thousand *yen* given by members of the German Reformed Church, was used for food put into "sympathy bags." A Japanese towel of good quality was folded several times and made up into a bag holding about two quarts. The bag was then filled with rice or other food and a copy of one of the Gospels put on top. In the center of the made-up bag is a cross on the right of which are the words "Christian Sympathy Bag" in Chinese characters, and on the left the name of the church or preaching-place. On the back of the bag is the character "Love." Of the twenty-five thousand such bags, several hundred, or several thousand, according to the need in that district, were given to each church

or preaching-place, no matter whether independent or connected with the German Reformed Mission, the Dutch Reformed Mission or the Japanese Mission Board (Dendō Kyoku). A successful effort was made to have not only the pastor or evangelist but a number of the members take part in the work. In addition to distributing them the local Christians made up nearly all of the bags themselves. In some places not only the members but the "seekers" as well rejoiced to have a part in the good work. Thus nearly every church and preaching-place was aroused and made active.

Christians helped to provide food and clothing for the body and in addition gave medicine for those who were sick; they took about 1200 helpless children from their homes of poverty and put them into Christian orphanages; they rescued a number of girls who were in danger of being sold into an evil life and located them in good homes in other cities; they preached a gospel of comfort and of hope and in many other ways showed that Christianity is a vital, practical religion suited to the Japan of to-day.

This was perhaps the greatest opportunity in the history of Christian work in Japan to show in a practical way the meaning of Christian love and sympathy. A profound and indelible impression has been made upon the whole nation. Those who were helped are deeply moved and are anxious to hear the Gospel. Regular preaching has been begun at several new places and there are many requests for sermons and addresses. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that a rich spiritual harvest may be reaped in this field which until recently was known as the famine region of North Japan.